

Defining Decisive: Toward Developing a Doctrinal Understanding of Decisive Operations and Decisive Points for the 21st Century Force

A Monograph

by

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ABSTRACT

DEFINING DECISIVE: TOWARD DEVELOPING A DOCTRINAL UNDERSTANDING OF DECISIVE OPERATIONS AND DECISIVE POINTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY FORCE, by Major Charles D. Lawhorn, 58 pages.

United States military forces are entering the 21st century doctrinally unprepared for the challenges that await. The *National Security Strategy of the United States*, the *National Military Strategy*, and *Joint Vision 2020* all posit the need for decisive joint action by U.S. military forces in accomplishing 21st century missions. However, on the joint level, *Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, published by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, contains military and associated definitional terms but no definition of the word “decisive,” or of the concept of a “decisive point.” This is true despite the fact that numerous joint publications other than *Joint Vision 2020* refer to the need for decisive action. Military problem-solving analysis based on a methodology of centers of gravity, decisive points, and decisive action are elemental tenants of military thought with foundation in classical strategic and operational theory. Draft versions of doctrinal publications awaiting approval, including *Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations*, and the Army’s *Field Manual 3-0, Operations*, do discuss the concept of “decisive operations,” centers of gravity, and decisive points, but they still do not attempt to devise a common sense meaning, or statement, of “decisive.” Navy and Air Force foundational doctrinal publications, while making frequent reference to “decisive” operations, again do not define “decisive.” Air Force and Navy doctrine also does not examine or define a concept of “decisive points.” Only the Marine Corps, in *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-3, Tactics*, defines “decisive” and gives a common sense meaning to the term. This monograph discusses the theoretical and historical foundations for the concept of the “decisive” in the works of Clausewitz and Jomini, and demonstrates the importance of a shared doctrinal vision and common understanding of the terms “decisive,” “decisive points,” and “centers of gravity” for military operations. It notes usage of the term “decisive” in strategic guidance like the *National Security Strategy* and the *National Military Strategy*, and the expectations of decisive operations by joint forces sought by *Joint Vision 2020*. It also examines joint and service doctrinal publications and their discussion of the concepts of “decisive,” “decisive points,” and centers of gravity. It demonstrates the doctrinal void in the very area where emphasis is placed by civilian authority: on the ability to act *decisively*. This monograph reasons that the linkage between theory and doctrine is broken where the pivotal concepts of decisiveness are involved, and that the lack of a common doctrinal understanding in this area may inhibit the effectiveness of 21st century military operations, adversely impacting unity of action and future joint warfare success. It stresses the primacy of a theory – doctrine linkage, and argues for a uniform definition of decisive terms in joint and service doctrine to repair the intellectual breach and provide a common frame of reference for the 21st century force.

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CHAPTER 1

THE SEARCH FOR THE HOLY GRAIL

Flash'd all their sabers bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air,
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd . . .¹

Lord Tennyson, *Charge of the Light Brigade*

In discussing the traditional themes that have guided modern military historians in their exposition of warfare since the 19th century, British historian John Keegan identifies the importance of action deemed to be decisive.² In his now-classic book, *The Face of Battle*, Keegan writes: “Battles are important. They decide things.”³ The allure of battle as decisive action, for good or for ill, is supreme. “For the majority it is the Decisive Battle idea which persists, because it is more dramatic, more clear-cut, simpler – both for

¹ Lord Alfred Tennyson, “Charge of the Light Brigade,” in The Poetical Works of Tennyson (G. Robert Stange, editor) (New York, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974), pp. 226-27.

² John Keegan, The Face of Battle (New York, New York: Random House, Inc., 1977 ed.), pp. 54-62.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 61. That battles decide things is often an elemental, though not always realized, military view. Keegan identified this over simplicity to illustrate a point. Keegan’s simplistic statement that battles are important because they decide things is an attempt to show the hypocrisy of writers who focus on battles as a decision without further exploring exactly what those battles decided, or in the larger scale how they were important. Romantic notions of “battles for battles’ sake” spawned writings of “an endless, repetitive examination of battles which have done nothing but to make the world worse” without examining the true historical impact, nature, and effect, of battles. Keegan, pp. 61-62.

the reader and the writer.”⁴ The notion of decisive battles and their utility, of course, is not unique to the 19th century. Homer’s *Iliad*, recounting events millennia ago, tells the tale of the Trojan War, and the complete and total destruction of Troy after a lengthy siege following the Grecian “gift” of the Trojan Horse.⁵ The Greeks sought a decisive end to Troy, and they attained it, albeit it after a protracted siege. The Trojan Horse provided the mechanism for quick, decisive defeat and an end to Troy.

As the 21st century dawns, American military forces prepare to face the challenges of a new millennium. Those challenges are not simply physical ones of how to deploy military forces, or of how to organize, train, and equip forces. Equally, if not more important, are the conceptual and intellectual challenges confronting theorists, doctrine writers, and planners. How the Army defines what is “decisive,” how it uses ideas related to “decisive” action in its evolving doctrine drafted to guide 21st century operations, and how well these concepts exist in concert with the anticipated joint and coalition environment of future operations, will have tremendous bearing on the success of the American military. This monograph focuses on Army concepts of decisive operations, and decisive points, and whether they remain relevant to 21st century warfare and distributive operations, and fit within the lexicon of joint operations.

⁴ Keegan, op. cit., p. 62.

⁵ Homer, The Iliad (Robert Fitzgerald, trans.) (New York, New York: Doubleday, 1974, 1989 ed.).

THE LIGHT BRIGADE

The military unit in Lord Alfred Tennyson's poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," provides an effective metaphor for military obsession with the decisive battle. It also maintains contemporary significance given the location of the battle in the Crimea, in the vicinity of the Caucasus and Baku, home to Asian oil from the Black Sea/Caspian Sea Region and the modern ethic and religious struggles of the "stans" – Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.⁶ The Black Sea/Caspian Sea region and its rise as an area of potential vital interest for the United States is emblematic of the challenges which face military forces of the United States in the future, and the volatility that lies under the seemingly peaceful veneer of the 21st century. Tennyson's poem speaks of military operations in the region in the middle of the nineteenth century, the romanticized charge of those six-hundred British light cavalry at Balaclava on October 25th, 1854, during the Crimean War. The reality was less than romantic, as Tennyson betrays, in his ironic juxtaposition of the glorious cavalry charge with the

⁶ The "stans" are countries divided along ethnic lines whose people do not necessarily support national allegiance to the nation-states they are or were associated with. Muslim sentiment has long helped Iran to exercise clout in the region, much to the dismay of the former Soviet Union, and now Russia, which is seeking to maintain stability and not lose ground to Iran. Language and cultural heritage have created a situation where countries that are part of the "stans" have a greater identification with Iran than with Russia, which does little to ease the concerns of a country formerly part of the Soviet Union and once surrounded by George Kennan's wall of containment from both NATO and the U.S. Afghanistan and Pakistan were not listed above as part of the "stans," but given the strife in the area, Afghanistan and Pakistan could probably also be included in that list. The war between the Soviet Union (Russia) and Afghanistan did little to help relieve fears of instability in the region, and Pakistan is a nuclear power often at odds with India. Add to this mix of the traditional "stans" the countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the presence of oil in the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, a recipe for future turmoil exists.

deadly mission of the unit. “Boldly they rode and well, [i]nto the jaws of Death, [i]nto the mouth of Hell [r]ode the Six hundred.”⁷ After their charge, “Then they rode back, but not, [n]ot the six hundred.” Only “All that was left of them, [l]eft of six hundred,” made the trip back from the “jaws of Death.”⁸

What ended up becoming the Crimean War was actually intended to be a short, decisive, punitive campaign by a British Expeditionary Force, “culminating in swift seizure of Sevastopol” from the Russians.⁹ That goal would prove to be a “pipe-dream.”¹⁰ The battle at Balaclava was part of a joint, combined operation also involving other armies (notably Turkey, an ally of the British) in a region of the world with strategic significance then and now. The presence of copious oil and natural gas resources in the Black Sea/Caspian Sea region was important to the Germans during World War II, resulting in Hitler’s “Operation *Blau* [in an attempt] to capture Caspian Sea oil fields.”¹¹ This same region has been identified as one of strategic political, economic, and military significance in the 21st century.¹²

⁷ Tennyson, op cit.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ John Sweetman, Balaclava 1854 / The Charge of the Light Brigade (London, England: Reed International Books Ltd., 1990), p. 6. This book is part of the Osprey *Military Campaign Series*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Lester W. Grau, “Hydrocarbons and a New Strategic Region: The Caspian Sea and Central Asia”, *Military Review*, vol. LXXI, no. 3 (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Department of the Army, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, May – June 2001), p. 17.

¹² Grau, op cit., pp. 17-26.

Traveling journalist Robert D. Kaplan, known for his insightful writings on geographic regions of the world and their past as well as current cultural heritage, agrees and identifies the Balkans/Caucasus region as a crucible of potentially violent change where western interests may lie.¹³ “This is a volatile region where the cultural legacies of the Byzantine, Persian, and Turkish empires overlap,” says Kaplan in his recent book *Eastward to Tartary*.¹⁴ “It contains 70 percent of the world’s proven oil and over 40 percent of its natural-gas reserves.”¹⁵ Kaplan reasons: “Just as the Austrian empire was the ‘seismograph of Europe’ in the nineteenth century, the New Near East – stretching from the Balkans eastward to ‘Tartary’ – might become the seismograph of world politics and the site of a ruthless struggle for natural resources in the twenty-first.”¹⁶

Current economic and political interests of the United States and its allies to ensure the free-flow of oil and development of hydrocarbon resources in the region make it conceivable that American and combined allied military forces might be deployed into the Caspian Sea region in the future. The problems encountered by the British in Balaclava could easily be similar to future difficulties for the U.S. in peace operations or conventional conflict in the Black Sea/Caspian Sea region.

Like the military forces of the United States, the Light Brigade was confident of victory. The mistaken belief of the Light Brigade was that victory was assured.

¹³ Robert D. Kaplan, Eastward to Tartary / Travels in the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus (New York, New York: Random House, Inc., 2000), p. 12. Kaplan provides amazing insight into the history of the region and the economic, demographic, and political forces which are yet influencing its demeanor.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Tennyson's force contained not a man that was "dismay'd", and the soldiers did not know "someone had blunder'd" in ordering the charge.¹⁷ For the light brigade: "Their's not to make reply, [t]heir's not to reason why, [t]heir's but to do and die."¹⁸ Like kindred warriors of days gone by, the six-hundred immortalized in Tennyson's poem fought so well, so many miles from home, under military leadership seeking to accomplish the political goals of civilian masters. As the American military looks to battles of the future and examines options for transforming the force to allow it to fight and win the decisive battle, the political environment of the 21st century and perceived military imperatives guide the development of theory and doctrine. What is sought in this exercise is not the *Light Brigade*, but the *right* brigade, accompanied by the proper statement of theory, doctrine, capabilities, and organization to allow decisive victory in the 21st century.

THE 21st CENTURY ENVIRONMENT

Military forces of the 21st century, like those of the prior century, must be able to fight and win the nation's wars. For the U.S. Army, that means not only fighting and winning those wars, but also being able to implement the policies of the United States. Title 10 of the United States Code gives the Army missions to "preserve peace and security"; provide for the defense of the United States; support national policies;

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Tennyson, op cit.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

implement the national objectives; and overcome any “nations responsible for aggressive acts that imperil the peace and security of the United States.”¹⁹ The *National Security Strategy*²⁰ of the United States articulates the policies, and national objectives, of the United States. “Our strategy is founded on continued U.S. engagement and leadership abroad”, which requires devoting “necessary resources to military, diplomatic, intelligence and other efforts.”²¹ Achieving national security objectives “requires sustained, long-term effort.”²²

Part of those efforts involve interaction with the community of nations through engagement. “A central thrust of our strategy [the *National Security Strategy*] is to strengthen and adapt the formal relationships we have with key nations around the world,

¹⁹ Title 10 U.S.C. § 3062(a), §§ (a)(1) through (a)(4).

²⁰ The election of President George Bush in November of 2000 has brought a new administration into power. The most recent version of the *National Security Strategy* was published about a year earlier, in December of 1999. The Bush Administration undoubtedly will publish a new *National Security Strategy*, and it is that new strategy which will help guide policy goals for the United States government. For the purposes of analysis, however, the new administration is not likely to make changes fundamentally different from past strategies. The over-arching theme of the last several *National Security Strategies*, including the 1998 version, has been one of engagement, and there is no indication that this new administration will change that basic approach to international affairs. Where, when, and how to engage may thus be in debate, but adherence to a general strategy of engagement is unlikely to change. That is true even given a possible reluctance on the part of a Bush Administration to engage in multiple peace operations with deployed U.S. forces. The current *National Security Strategy* already notes that the “use of the Armed Forces for engagement [must] be selective.” *National Security Strategy* (1999), p. 11. Since the current strategy already identifies the importance of care in wielding military power for engagement strategies, any changes occurring in the Bush Administration should not be a departure from current practice in theory, though perhaps in form.

²¹ A *National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, December 1999), p. 3.

²² *Ibid.*

create new relationships and structures when necessary, and enhance the capability of friendly nations to exercise regional leadership in support of shared goals.”²³ The United States’ strategy of engagement goes beyond formal relationships such as those of the United Nations or other international organizations. “At other times, we seek to shape a favorable international environment outside of formal structures by building coalitions of like-minded nations.”²⁴ The need to “go it alone,” however, and continue to lead when consensus cannot be reached remains important. “But we must always be prepared to act alone when that is our most advantageous course, or when we have no alternative.”²⁵ When that time comes, says the *National Security Strategy*, the United States “must be prepared and willing to use all appropriate instruments of national power.”²⁶

When other implements of national power fail (diplomatic, informational, and economic), the military exists to fulfill its Title 10 responsibility by supporting national policies and implementing national objectives. Achieving national security objectives requires not only political commitment in a general sense, but also a willingness to use military force when the situation requires its use. “[S]ustaining our engagement abroad over the long term will require the support of the American people and the Congress to bear the costs of defending U.S. interests – in dollars, effort and, when necessary, with

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

military force.”²⁷ The *National Security Strategy* thus recognizes the military’s role as not simply a method of engagement, but also as a method of *decision*. “Although military activities are an important pillar of our effort to shape the global security environment, we must always be mindful that the primary mission of our Armed Forces is to deter and, if necessary, to fight and win conflicts in which our vital interests are threatened.”²⁸ Clausewitz likened the relationship between commerce and money to that of military forces and a decision, relating an analogy that not only still holds true but also has modern resilience in the increasingly interconnected world of the 21st century where globalization unites political and business entities and links commerce.²⁹ According to Clausewitz: “The decision by arms is for all major and minor operations in war what cash payment is in commerce. Regardless how complex the relationship between the two parties, regardless how rarely settlements actually occur, they can never be entirely absent.”³⁰

Joint Vision 2020, published by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and formulated to “build upon and extend the conceptual template established by *Joint Vision 2010* to guide the continuing transformation of America’s Armed Forces,” also

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁹ For a complete discussion of the phenomenon of globalization, and the economic, social, and political impacts of globalization, a recent book by celebrated economist Thomas L. Friedman details these matters in depth. See Thomas L. Friedman, The Lexus and the Olive Tree (New York, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

³⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, On War (Michael Howard and Peter Paret, editors) (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 97.

recognizes the need for decisive action by the American military.³¹ As stated in *Joint Vision 2020*: “The primary purpose of those forces [U.S. Armed Forces] has been and will be to fight and win the Nation’s wars. The overall goal of the transformation described in this document is the creation of a force that is dominant across the full spectrum of military operations – persuasive in peace, *decisive* in war, preeminent in any form of conflict.”³² *Joint Vision 2020* continues:

In 2020, the nation will face a wide range of interests, opportunities, and challenges and will require a military that can both win wars and contribute to peace. The global interests and responsibilities of the United States will endure, and there is no indication that threats to those interests and responsibilities or to our allies, will disappear. The strategic concepts of *decisive* force, power projection, overseas presence, and strategic agility will continue to govern our efforts to fulfill those responsibilities and meet the challenges of the future.³³

Meeting these challenges, and achieving “operational success in the future”, will require utilization of “the joint force, because of its flexibility and responsiveness.”³⁴

Joint Vision 2020’s purpose is to “describe in broad terms the human talent – the professional, well-trained, and ready force – *and operational capabilities* that will be required for the joint force to succeed across the full range of military operations and accomplish its mission in 2020 and beyond.”³⁵ “The vision recognizes the importance of

³¹ *Joint Vision 2020 – America’s Military: Preparing for Tomorrow* (Washington, D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 2000), p. 1. *Joint Vision 2020* also appears in the Summer 2000 issue of the journal *Joint Force Quarterly*. See “JV 2020: America’s Military Preparing for Tomorrow”, *Joint Force Quarterly No. 25* (Washington, D.C.: The Institute for National and Strategic Studies National Defense University, Summer 2000).

³² *Ibid.* Emphasis is added.

³³ *Ibid.* Emphasis is added.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3. Emphasis is added.

technology and technical innovation to the US military and its operations. At the same time, it emphasizes that technological innovation must be accompanied by intellectual innovation leading to changes in organization and doctrine. Only then can we reach the full potential of the joint force – *decisive capabilities* across the full range of military operations.”³⁶

The required operational capabilities *Joint Vision 2020* deems essential to future military success and full spectrum dominance are dominant maneuver, precision engagement, focused logistics, and full dimensional protection.³⁷ All of these core concepts embody the notion of decisive action, or facilitate means to decisive action.³⁸ Dominant maneuver, for example, describes a capability where the joint force “will possess unmatched speed and ability in positioning and repositioning tailored forces from widely dispersed locations to achieve operational objectives quickly and *decisively*.”³⁹ Dominant maneuver allows the commander to “occupy key positions to shape the course of events and minimize hostilities or react *decisively* if hostilities erupt.”⁴⁰ As for a specific definition of the term “dominant maneuver,” *Joint Vision 2020* states:

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3. The operational concepts themselves (dominant maneuver, precision engagement, focused logistics, and full dimensional protection) are discussed in *Joint Vision 2020* at pages 20-27.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20. Emphasis is added.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Emphasis is added.

Dominant Maneuver is the ability of joint forces to gain positional advantage with *decisive* speed and overwhelming operational tempo in the achievement of assigned military tasks. Widely dispersed joint air, land, sea, amphibious, special operations and space forces, capable of scaling and massing force or forces and the effects of fires as required for either combat or noncombat operations, will secure advantage across the range of military operations through the application of information, deception, engagement, mobility and counter-mobility capabilities.⁴¹

The concept of “dominant maneuver” is consistent with goals of the 2020 force to be “persuasive in peace, decisive in war, and preeminent in any form of conflict.”⁴²

The desire to be able to employ “decisive” force through military action stands not only at the root of an historian’s inquiry, but exists also at the very core of current U.S. strategy and proposed U.S. military doctrine. Interestingly, however, nowhere in the *National Security Strategy*, or *Joint Vision 2020*, may a definition of the term “decisive” in its many uses be found. “To build the most effective force for 2020, we must be fully joint: intellectually, operationally, organizationally, doctrinally, and technically.”⁴³

THE ROLE OF THEORY AND DOCTRINE

The role of theory, and its relationship to the development of military doctrine, should not be understated. Theory will “light his [the soldier’s] way,” says Clausewitz, “ease his progress, train his judgment, and help him to avoid pitfalls . . . It is meant to educate the mind of the future commander, or, more accurately, to guide him in his self-education, not to accompany him to the battlefield; just as a wise teacher guides and stimulates a young man’s intellectual development, but is careful not to lead him by the

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Bold emphasis is in the original text; emphasis in italics is added.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 36.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

hand for the rest of his life.”⁴⁴ The intellectual, operational, organizational, doctrinal, and technical understanding *Joint Vision 2020* indicates is necessary for the conduct of successful operations in the 21st century is built upon concepts, upon ideas that allow translation of those ideas into action. There is a conceptual line of thought connecting theory, doctrine, and the application of those concepts to the physical dimension of the battle space.

Regarding theory, according to theorist James Schneider, there are two components of theory, one conceptual, one cognitive.⁴⁵ “Conceptually theory is like a map. It provides a conceptual correlation between the underlying ‘terrain’ of the real world and our conceptual reconstruction of that world . . . [m]ilitary theory extends the static map analogy by representing war as a dynamic blueprint.”⁴⁶ This conceptual dimension “has immense practical importance, because it provides a framework” to help answer important questions.⁴⁷ “For instance, at the tactical level, the planner uses battles and engagements as his primary executive instruments of national policy. Military theory helps explain how and why the operation failed.”⁴⁸ “Cognitively, the study of military theory strengthens the mind.”⁴⁹ Together, the conceptual and cognitive aspects of

⁴⁴ Clausewitz, *op cit.*, p. 141.

⁴⁵ James J. Schneider, “What If We Fight Tonight? / Advanced Military Education for the XXIst Century” (*Association of Advanced Operational Studies NET CALL*, Vol. II, Number 2, Fall – Winter 1994-95), p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

military theory, as part of the process of education, help “develop uncommon solutions [to military problems] that lie outside the box of the ordinary.”⁵⁰ The bottom line: “theory allows us to dominate reality to our own advantage.”⁵¹

“The notion of dominating military reality, especially with respect to some future, finally links theory, through doctrine, to practice.”⁵² Theory provides an intellectual genesis for doctrine, a linkage between the conceptual and cognitive processes involved in theory and the application of those ideas to a common understanding of how to conduct military operations. “If doctrine acts as ‘the rudder of an army,’ then theory stands as its helmsman. Theory must so thoroughly embrace doctrine that a change in the former will immediately and directly affect the latter. Without this union the nation’s armed forces will be cast adrift without any means to maneuver a proper course through the shoals of a future conflict.”⁵³ Military doctrine provides that foundation for common understanding, an essentially commonality from which departure to create novel solutions to problems may be made. “Doctrine first defines the profession along common conceptual lines . . . [and] provides the framework for effective unified action in training, education, and war.”⁵⁴ It remains extremely

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ James J. Schneider, “How War Works: The Origins, Nature, and Purpose of Military Theory” (Leavenworth, Kansas: The School of Advanced Military Studies, 16 June 1995), pp. 9-10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

important that doctrine act to inform, rather than confuse, and maintain its etiological link between itself and theory.

Perhaps recognizing this, the 1986 version of Army Field Manual 100-5, *Operations*, described operational art in traditional Clausewitzian terms. Obstacles in war, said Clausewitz, “tend to vanish in the face of decisive victories.”⁵⁵ The idea of decisive action, now prevalent as noted by Keegan, appears within the 1986 FM 100-5 not only for its tactical significance in single battles, but also in its discussion of Operational Art applicable to campaign planning. Operational Art in the Army’s 1986 operations manual “involves fundamental decisions about when and where to fight and whether to accept or decline battle”, and at “[i]ts essence is the identification of the enemy’s operational center of gravity . . . and the concentration of superior combat power against that point to achieve a decisive success.”⁵⁶ The Army’s stress on decisive

⁵⁵ Clausewitz, *op cit.*, p. 344. That is not to say, of course, that Clausewitz believed in the term “decisive” as meaning “final.” As Clausewitz observed: “Lastly, even the ultimate outcome of a war is not always to be regarded as final. The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date.” Clausewitz, p. 80.

⁵⁶ Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, D.C: Headquarters, Department of the Army, May 1986), p. 10. The concept of a center of gravity is commonly associated with Clausewitz, and its presence within U.S. Army concepts of operational art indicates the prevailing influence of his work. Clausewitz also looked at the importance of engaging the enemy in battle, the choice of where and when to do so. The decision as to whether to accept or decline battle has historically been very important. In *On War*, Clausewitz discusses the meaning behind the expression “vainly offering battle to the enemy,” giving examples such as that of Hannibal and Fabius, where Fabius declined battle though “offered” it by Hannibal. Seeking to maximize any advantage, commanders then (and now) try to obtain an asymmetric advantage based on weaponry, terrain, or even sheer numbers, and will attempt to dictate battle at a time and place of their choosing. This was especially true in the ancient world, says Clausewitz, because of the conditions needed to set the stage for battles (leaving the encampment, finding accessible terrain, and the like). “Hence, when we read that Hannibal vainly offered battle to Fabius, all we learn about Fabius is that a battle did not figure in his plan. This does not prove either the material or

operations in the 1986 version of FM 100-5 was the result of focus on taking back the initiative and conducting offensive-oriented, decisive combat through Air-Land Battle doctrine, and improving upon the Active Defense doctrine contained in the 1976 version of FM 100-5.⁵⁷ More than their Cold War counterparts from the 1980s, 21st century military forces seeking to meet the requirements of *Joint Vision 2020* and prepare for the challenges of an increasingly complex, uncertain world are even more apt to require sound doctrinal guidance dealing with decisive concepts.

THE ISSUE – WHAT IS DECISIVE?

What is “decisive,” what is known as “decisive action” or a “decisive operation,” is important. Both 21st century military doctrine, and the political strategy that guides it, deal with the need to be able to execute decisive operations. What is striking about all this emphasis on the “decisive” is not the historical significance of decisive battles themselves, but the lack of uniformity and understanding as to what exactly is meant by the term “decisive.” An examination of current U.S. military doctrine, as found in Joint

moral superiority of Hannibal. Yet the expression is correct so far as the latter is concerned: Hannibal genuinely wanted to fight.” Clausewitz, p. 245. One of the identified geniuses of Frederick the Great during his initial campaigns was the ability to engage his enemies and defeat their armies, and not allow them to escape or deny battle.

⁵⁷ FM 100-5 (1986), op cit. See also Paul W. Herbert, “Deciding What Has to Be Done: General William E. DePuy and the 1976 Edition of FM 100-5, Operations”, *Leavenworth Paper No. 16* (Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: Headquarters, Department of the Army, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, June 1988).

Publications (also known as “Joint Pubs”, or “JPs”), and doctrinal publications of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force, indicates that there is no common understanding of what is meant by “decisive.” Without that common understanding, the supremacy of joint military forces sought through *Joint Vision 2020*, and the *National Security Strategy* of the United States, fails for lack of a foundation and a common vision.

This monograph examines the various definitions of “decisive” used by the United States military, and specifically the conceptual basis underlying the Army concept of “decisive” operations and “decisive points” as now found in the soon-to-be-published Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, which will replace FM 100-5. It examines the current relevance of a “decisive” concept, and of “decisive points,” for applicability to 21st century military operations, and for a theory – doctrine link that supports a common vision for “decisive” military operations. It applies *Joint Vision 2020*’s four operational concepts (dominant maneuver, precision engagement, focused logistics, and full dimensional protection) as criteria to judge the conceptual soundness of current Army and joint military doctrine pertaining to definitions of decisive operations and decisive points. It attempts to end, or at least aid, the search for the Holy Grail represented by the quest of the military mind for decisive battles and outcomes by helping to create a common vision, and understanding, of military thought in that area.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARD A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF DECISIVE

Prompt as they consequently ever are in action, none are slower than they in succumbing to suffering, and never have they been known in any predicament to be beaten by numbers, by ruse, by difficulties of ground, or even by fortune – for they feel surer of victory than of fortune's power. Where counsel thus precedes active operations, where the leader's plan of campaign is followed up by so efficient an army, no wonder that the empire has extended its boundaries on the east to the Euphrates, on the west to the ocean, on the south to the most fertile tracts of north Africa, on the north to the Danube and the Rhine.⁵⁸

Grant, *The Army of the Caesars*

WHEN IN ROME . . .

The word “decisive” is the word of choice for military operations. It traces its lineage back to ancient times. The Roman legions, described by Michael Grant in relating Josephus' observation of their prowess in the quotation above, turned decisive military action into an empire of amazing political stability. That political stability came from the delicate balance existing between the Roman senate, the people of the Roman Empire, and the emperor who wielded the amazing might of the legions – “these forming the *senatus populusque Romanus* (SPQR) which comprised the state itself.”⁵⁹ Much like expectations for the 21st century military forces of the United States, the Roman army fought and won decisive battles, acted to quell rebellion, and was a deterrent force

⁵⁸ Michael Grant, *The Army of the Caesars* (New York, New York: Scribner, 1974), p. xxviii. Grant, in this passage, is quoting the Jewish historian Josephus, and Josephus' views on the power and might of the Roman army.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

supporting the political infrastructure and maintaining the peace. The Roman army also existed as a mechanism of stability through its forward presence within the empire in what we would recognize today as part of an “engagement” strategy.

The forward presence of the Roman legions, and the ability to project military power combined with the will to use it, complemented by the reputation of the empire and the economic benefits of peace afforded by the Romans, sustained the empire and its institutions. “[T]he Roman army influenced and dominated the internal development and administration of the empire for nearly half a millennium.”⁶⁰ Roman historian Edward Gibbon, quoted by Grant in *The Army of the Caesars*, pointed to the importance of the army because it was the only institution which could maintain the empire: ““the army is the only order of men sufficiently united to concur in the same sentiments, and powerful enough to impose them on the rest of their fellow-citizens.””⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 287. So as not to mislead the reader, the Roman experience described was one of literal empire, and not democratic exchange of governmental interaction as in the United States’ republican form of government. Grant does make it clear that there was a constant tension between the need to maintain an army strong enough to hold the empire together, and the irony that the existence of such an army threatened the civil power of the emperor. “The power of this army had set the emperors a singularly intractable problem. On the one hand an army must exist, and a formidable one at that, in order to guard the empire against its external and internal foes. But at the same time each ruler had only too good cause to feel anxious about the loyalty of his soldiers, since there was always a grave danger that they would overthrow him . . . The army, as he rightly saw it, was a constant peril to its imperial master.” Grant, p. 286. Grant believes that the very strength of that army required to maintain the empire helped hasten in the erosion of Rome because of those pressures. “The difficulty presented by the existence of an army which had to be strong enough to keep the empire in existence, and was therefore also strong enough to threaten each successive emperor, was never surmounted. Or rather it was surmounted to a certain extent, but only by the continual exertions of every emperor in turn . . . It was due to the army that the empire went on and on. But it was also due to the army that internal stability never was and never could be achieved. And because of this fatal weakness at the top – which was directly caused by the preponderance of the army – the empire sustained enormous, continuing losses, amounting sometimes to total

The old adage suggests that “In Rome, do as the Romans do.” Given the might of the empire, that advice was both sound and ominous. The United States maintains its instruments of national power (the popular “DIME,” an acronym listing the instruments of national power: diplomatic, informational, military, and economic) much like the Romans. In Rome all the instruments of national power seen today were present: the diplomatic implement present in the counsels, pro-counsels, and governors of the empire; the informational implement spread by the high literacy of the empire; the military element represented by the legions; and the economic element present in the trade relations of the empire which for centuries acted to better the economic lot of the Romans and encourage Roman citizenship and assimilation of other peoples into Roman culture.

The military is the “big stick” of Teddy Roosevelt fame which supports all the other elements of national power. It furthers political ends by allowing negotiation and the exercise of diplomacy from a position of strength, and stands both with, and behind, the other implements of national power as part of an engagement strategy. According to the *National Military Strategy* of the United States, the document which develops military objectives supporting the ends sought by political strategy contained in the *National Security Strategy*: “The military is a complementary element of national power that stands with the other instruments wielded by our government. The Armed Forces’ core competence is *the ability to apply decisive military power* to deter or defeat

paralysis.” Grant, p. 287. The lesson for the United States is one reinforcing the importance of civilian control of the military to maintain political stability both internally and abroad.

aggression and achieve our national security objectives.”⁶² The focus, consistent with both the *National Security Strategy* and *Joint Vision 2020*, is on the ability to engage in *decisive* action.

DUELING DEFINITIONS

Keegan’s elaboration of modern emphasis on the decisive battle discussed at the beginning of this monograph has found its way into the political underpinnings of military authority through *Title 10* of the United States Code and the *National Security Strategy*, and within the military by way of the *National Military Strategy* and *Joint Vision 2020*. “Everything is governed by a supreme law,” writes Clausewitz, “the decision by force of arms . . .”⁶³ “The violent resolution of the crisis, the wish to annihilate the enemy’s forces, is the first-born son of war.”⁶⁴ Clausewitz recognizes the destructive element of war as impacting everyone, and the dangerous tendency to enter into it ill-advisedly under the guise of attempts at a bloodless conflict. “Kind-hearted people might of course think there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat an enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war. Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed: war is such a dangerous

⁶² *National Military Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 1997), p. 5. The emphasis given in the text is added. The current *National Military Strategy* is somewhat dated, originating in 1997. Like the *National Security Strategy*, a new *National Military Strategy* is expected to be published relatively soon by the Bush Administration.

⁶³ Clausewitz, *op cit.*, p. 99.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst.”⁶⁵ The ability to project and use *decisive* force allows U.S. National Command Authority (NCA) more range of options in responding to national security issues. Engagement strategies are strengthened, and diplomatic solutions are presented with the solid backing of a credible, coercive threat.

Powerful military forces provide a credible deterrent, supporting stability and security through the principle of coercion.⁶⁶ Having a coercive capability, and the ability to wield it, was one of the Romans’ great strengths. Like Josephus’ purpose in describing the powers of the Roman legions, there is a reason for maintaining a decisive military capability: “If I have dwelt at some length on this topic [the power of the Roman Army], my intension was not so much to *extol* the Romans as to *console* those whom they have vanquished – and to *deter* others who may be tempted to revolt.”⁶⁷

The goal of military operations, it seems, is to be able to conduct “decisive” actions that result, not surprisingly, in a *decision*. What is further meant, however, is that the ability of the enemy and its military forces to resist has been crushed, or the enemy

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶⁶ Coercion theory provides a useful analysis and conceptual framework for deterrence. Coercion theory is a topic in of itself suitable for elaboration within a monograph or thesis specifically dedicated solely to it. For a treatment of coercion theory, see Thomas C. Schelling, Arms and Influence (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1966). Coercion theory suggests the use of latent violence, of the threat of force and the real ability to use it, to encourage favorable action on the part of protagonists. In coercion, “the ideal of ‘victory’ inadequately expresses what a nation wants from its military forces. Mostly it wants, in these times, the influence that resides in latent force. It wants the bargaining power that comes from its capacity to hurry, not just the direct consequence of successful military action.” Shelling, p. 31.

⁶⁷ Grant, op cit., p. xxviii.

has been placed in a position where out of necessity or interest it has agreed to the terms of that decision.

The word “decisive” carries with it the illusion of finality. Army doctrinal publications treat it somewhat differently. In ST 3-0,⁶⁸ the released student text of the Army’s *Operations* manual used to instruct the 2001 graduating class of the Army Command and General Staff Officer Course at Fort Leavenworth, a “decisive” operation is part of the “battlefield organization” for Army operations.⁶⁹ The battlefield organization shows the allocation of forces within the Area of Operations (AO) by their purpose as part of “three all-encompassing categories of operations: decisive, shaping,

⁶⁸ Student Text 3-0, *Operations* (Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: United States Army Command and General Staff College, October 19, 2000). The distribution release notice, and the disclaimer contained within ST 3-0, identifies it as “a Student Text manual, not a doctrinal publication”, and that “the material in this manual is NOT approved doctrine.” Normally, citation to a student text would only be made in a peripheral sense. In this case, however, there has been a delay of nearly a year in the publication of FM 3-0, and the FM 3-0 version in current release is the DRAG edition for coordination published on June 15, 2000. The DRAG edition, while being an earlier version of the “final” text, contains similar restrictions on use as a doctrinal reference source: “This draft is for review purpose only and does not reflect DA [Department of the Army] final approval. It is not approved doctrine and cannot be used for reference or citation.” FM 3-0, *Operations* (DRAG edition) (Washington, D.C: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 15 June 2000), p. i. ST 3-0, which was published by the Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) to help introduce the new doctrine for Army operations to students at CGSC, is the newer version of the complete manual and the copy sent to the Army Chief of Staff for signature. There are very few differences between the student text and DRAG version of the manuals, and the definitions of “decisive,” “decisive point,” and similar concepts that are the subject of this monograph do not differ between the two sources. Therefore, for ease of future reference after publication of the final doctrinal version of 3-0, and as the intent is to use the most current information available, citation to the new Army Operations manual will be made to ST 3-0, rather than the FM 3-0 (DRAG) edition.

⁶⁹ ST 3-0, ¶ 4-83.

and sustaining.”⁷⁰ The battlefield organization is used “as part of the military decision making process [MDMP], [and] commanders visualize their battlespace and determine how to arrange their forces.”⁷¹ “Decisive Operations” within that battlespace are those that directly accomplish the task assigned by the higher headquarters.⁷² As task-orientation is the definitional focus, the tendency is to think of decisive operations in tactical sense, rather than within the realm of operational art. ST 3-0 attempts to resolve this possible disconnect by further elaborating on what it means to directly accomplish the task assigned from the higher headquarters in a decisive operation:

Decisive operations *conclusively* determine the outcome of major operations, battles, and engagements. There is only *one* decisive operation for any major operation, battle, or engagement for any given echelon. The decisive operation may include multiple actions conducted simultaneously throughout the AO. Commanders weight the decisive operation by economizing on combat power allocated to shaping operations.⁷³

A decisive operation under emerging Army doctrine, then, conclusively, or finally, determines the entire outcome of major operations, battles, or engagements. There is a

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.* The term “battlespace,” for the new Army *Operations* manual, is “conceptual.” ST 3-0, ¶ 4-78. “Commanders determine their battlespace based on their concept of operations, accomplishing the mission, and protecting the force. Commanders use their experience, professional knowledge, and understanding of the situation to visualize and change their battlespace as current operations transition to future operations. Battlespace is not synonymous with AO [Area of Operations]. However, because battlespace is conceptual, Army forces conduct operations only within that portion of it delineated by their AO.” *Ibid.* Battlespace, defined, “is the environment, factors, and conditions commanders must understand to successfully apply combat power, protect the force, or complete the mission. This includes the air, land, sea, space, and the included enemy and friendly forces, facilities, weather, terrain, the electromagnetic spectrum, and the information environment within the operational areas and areas of interest.” *Ibid.*, ¶ 4-77.

⁷² *Ibid.*, ¶ 4-84.

⁷³ *Ibid.* Emphasis is added.

final outcome which has an impact on all other operations by accomplishing the main task or mission assigned to the unit and furthering or fulfilling the commander's intent.

In the joint arena, there does not appear to be any clear guidance in current doctrinal publications as to what is "decisive," and the finality the Army attaches to a "decisive" operation does not exist in the same sense in the joint concept. While *Joint Vision 2020* stresses joint action to achieve decisive results as a fundamental part of its concept, joint definitions of "decisive" are absent from the most elemental of documents, the joint dictionary. Joint Publication (Joint Pub) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, does not address a "decisive" operation, and speaks only to a "decisive engagement"; there also is no joint definition of the word "decisive" itself.⁷⁴ "In land and naval warfare," "decisive engagement" is "an engagement in which a unit is considered fully committed and cannot maneuver or extricate itself [from battle]. In the absence of outside assistance, the action must be fought to a conclusion and either won or lost with the forces at hand."⁷⁵ This joint definition of a "decisive engagement" is much closer to what the Army considers as a unit that has been "fixed" and is unable to move from a particular location.⁷⁶ There is little resemblance to what the Army considers as "decisive."

⁷⁴ Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, January 10, 2000), p. 125.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Field Manual 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Graphics* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 30 September 1997), p. 1-68. FM 101-5-1 is the Army dictionary of military terms. The Marine Corps and the Army share commonality in the definitions and terms within FM 101-5-1. The identical Marine Corps version of FM 101-5-1 is MCRP 5-2A.

The proposed new version of Joint Pub 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, also contains no definition of the word “decisive.”⁷⁷ Joint Pub 3-0 does mention the idea of decisive operations in passing, however, during a discussion of phasing for joint operations. “During combat situations, decisive operations focus on winning and may include control of adversary territory and population and destruction of the adversary’s ability and will to continue.”⁷⁸ This phrasing suggests the possible intent of decisive action as a final, conclusive determination of outcomes through military action. The mechanism for that outcome is combat. It does not address situations thought to be principally non-combat, such as peace operations, in any concrete manner. “In noncombat situations, the JFC [joint force commander] seeks to dominate the situation with decisive operations designed to establish conditions for an early, favorable conclusion.”⁷⁹ There is little similarity between the Army concept of “decisive,” which seems to convey finality, and the current state of joint doctrine which omits even the vague specificity present in Army doctrine.

The problem is systemic. Ambiguity in defining what is decisive is not limited to Army doctrine and joint publications alone. An identification of what the term

⁷⁷ Joint Publication 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (Final Coordination Draft) (Washington, D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 5 February 2001). Joint Pub 3-0 is the joint equivalent of the Army’s 3-0. There is a sprinkling of “decisive” within the text of the new Joint Pub 3-0. For example, within a discussion of phasing for joint operations, Joint Pub 3-0 does mention the possible need for a “halt phase” “when decisive combat operations are required to terminate aggression and achieve US objectives,” and a “lodgment phase” to allow “the movement and buildup of a decisive force in the operational area.” *Ibid.*, p. III-21. A “decisive operations and stabilization phase” is also mentioned. *Ibid.*, p. III-22.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. III-22.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

“decisive” means is also absent from current Air Force and Navy doctrine. For example, Air Force Doctrine Document 1 (AFDD 1), *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, nowhere defines “decisive.”⁸⁰ AFDD 2, *Organization and Employment of Aerospace Power*, likewise does not define decisive.⁸¹ AFDD 1 expresses elemental principles of basic U.S. Air Force doctrine, while AFDD 2 applies those principles to the actual organization and employment of the Air Force, formally introducing the concept of the Aerospace Expeditionary Force.⁸² AFDD 1 and 2 together comprise the equivalent of the Army’s 3-0 operations manual: “AFDD 2 is the companion document to AFDD 1.”⁸³

One concept that is discussed in U.S. Air Force doctrine and uses the word “decisive” is the “decisive halt.”⁸⁴ “The point of ‘decisive halt’ is to force the enemy beyond their culminating point through the early and sustained overwhelming application of air and space power.”⁸⁵ In a “halt,” the idea is to deny “an enemy the capability to

⁸⁰ Air Force Doctrine Document 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Headquarters, Air Force Doctrine Center, September 1997).

⁸¹ Air Force Doctrine Document 2, *Organization and Employment of Aerospace Power* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Headquarters, Air Force Doctrine Center, 17 February 2000).

⁸² AFDD 1 “establishes general doctrinal guidance for the application of air and space forces in operations across the full range of military operations from global nuclear or conventional warfare to military operations other than war (MOOTW).” AFDD 1, p. v. AFDD 2 “builds upon the fundamental presented in AFDD 1, Air Force Basic Doctrine, and provides a broad overview of how the US Air Force transitions to contingency operations, organizes itself afield, and assesses, plans, and executes its assigned missions.” AFDD 2, p. ix. Chapter three of AFDD 2 discusses the aerospace expeditionary force. AFDD 2, pp. 33-46.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. i.

⁸⁴ AFDD 1, op cit., pp. 40-44; AFDD 2, op cit., pp. 22-23.

⁸⁵ AFDD 1, op cit., p. 42.

offensively employ his forces.”⁸⁶ AFDD 1 also discusses the idea of airpower alone as “decisive,” and the “decisive counteroffensive.”⁸⁷ There is no mention in either doctrine document, however, as to what exactly is meant by “decisive,” although it is reasonable to surmise that the common sense intent is for a “decisive” use of power to actually turn the tide of battle and assure friendly victory.

As for the U.S. Navy, which inherited views stressing the importance of “decisive” naval battle from naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan,⁸⁸ Naval Doctrine Publication (NDP) 1, *Naval Warfare*, gives no definition of “decisive.”⁸⁹ Among other references to decisive operations, NDP 1 mentions that naval forces must have: “[t]he ability to engage the enemy at sea decisively”; that “[m]obility is a key to decisive naval operations”; and that “[t]he readiness and presence of deployed naval forces provide the Commander-in-Chief the enabling force he needs to respond decisively and without the limitations of lengthy transit times.”⁹⁰ The closest NDP 1 comes to defining decisive is in its statement that “[w]ar at sea is the application of decisive offensive force to achieve

⁸⁶ AFDD 2, op cit., p. 22.

⁸⁷ AFDD 1, op cit., p. 41.

⁸⁸ Philip A. Crowl, “Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian”, in The Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age (Peter Paret, editor) (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 444-477. Crowl relates the thoughts of U.S. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson concerning the enduring influence of Mahan on the Navy during World War II. Stimson “ruefully recalled ‘the peculiar psychology of the navy Department, which frequently seemed to retire from the realm of logic into a dim religious world in which Neptune was God, mahan his prophet, and the United States Navy the only true Church.’” Crowl, p. 444.

⁸⁹ Naval Doctrine Publication 1, *Naval Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, 28 March 1994).

control of the sea.”⁹¹ Naval Warfare Publication (NWP) 1-02, *Naval Supplement to the DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, is also silent in defining “decisive.”⁹² NWP 1-02 does define the Marine Corps term “decisive objective,” which is the “single military objective whose capture, control, or seizure contributes most to the accomplishment of the mission.”⁹³

Marine Corps doctrine places a premium on “acting decisively.”⁹⁴ “Our [the Marine Corps’] ability to understand the situation is useless if we are not prepared to act decisively. When the opportunity arrives, we must exploit it fully and aggressively, committing every ounce of combat power we can muster and pushing ourselves to the limits of exhaustion.”⁹⁵ The Marine Corps appears to be the only armed service that specifically defines the *meaning* of decisive: “To be decisive, a battle or an engagement *must lead to a result beyond itself*. Within a battle, an action that is decisive must lead directly to winning in the campaign or war as a whole. *For the battle to be decisive, it must lead directly to a larger success in the war as a whole.*”⁹⁶ The utility to this definition is it attaches a concrete meaning to what it is to be decisive that goes beyond

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 13, 29.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁹² Naval Warfare Publication 1-02, *Naval Supplement to the DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, June 1995). As its title indicates, NWP 1-02 is the Navy-specific addendum to Joint Pub 1-02.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 2-17.

⁹⁴ Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1-3, *Tactics* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 30 July 1997), p. 29.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23. Emphasis is in the original.

rhetoric, or Keegan's expressed irony that historians performing simplistic analysis prefer "decisive" battles because they decide things. Like Keegan's conscious historian who writes about the larger impact of a decisive operation and its contribution to an overall political – military effort, Marine Corps doctrine puts "flesh" on the meaning of the term "decisive" through the MCDP 1-3 definition.

The Marine Corps definition is consistent with the Army ST 3-0 definition where a "decisive operation" conclusively determines the outcomes of major operations, battles, and engagements. The Marine Corps definition, however, has more utility in that it does not limit the realm of decision to a single, decisive operation like the definition of the Army, and conceptually it transcends the levels of war (tactical, operational, and strategic) by emphasizing decisive actions as those that lead to a result beyond themselves, and directly lead to a larger success in war as a whole.⁹⁷

Being decisive is *important*. When you are "decisive," you are able to achieve a decision in battle, or by analogy in a noncombat operation a decision that supports U.S. policy goals. The costs of being indecisive in battle are high. As stated in MCDP 1-3:

First, achieving a decision is *important*. An indecisive battle wastes the lives of those who fight and die in it. It wastes the efforts of those who survive as well. All the costs – the deaths, the wounds, the sweat and effort, the equipment destroyed or used up, the supplies expended – are suffered for little gain. Such battles have no meaning except for the comparative losses and perhaps an incremental gain for one side or the other.⁹⁸

The Marine Corps definition of decisive is specific without limiting the application of what is meant by "decisive." It is stated in plain language, is easily understandable, and

⁹⁷ The Army definition of decisive operations is limited: "There is only one decisive operation." ST 3-0, ¶ 4-84.

⁹⁸ MCDP 1-3, *op cit.*, p. 22. Emphasis is in the original.

generally fits within the myriad of uses for the term “decisive” contained in other military service doctrine and joint doctrine.

The cost of indecisive battle is akin to the cost of indecisive thought. Loss following indecisive battles may be measured in national treasure – the lives of sons and daughters. The informed leader, thoughtful in deed, committed to the mission, and armed with the tools of experience and professional military education seeks decisive action to accomplish the mission while preserving that national treasure by minimizing unnecessary loss. The key is that decisiveness is not an end in itself:

We must not seek decisiveness for its own sake. We do not, after all, seek a decision if it is likely to be against us. We seek to ensure – insofar as this is possible, given the inherent uncertainties of war – that the battle will go our way. We have stacked the deck in our favor before the cards are laid on the table. Otherwise, to seek decisive battle is an irresponsible gamble.”⁹⁹

Decisiveness is a means to an end. A common understanding among the services, based on a doctrinal definition of “decisive,” will help further the unity of effort in joint operations sought by *Joint Vision 2020*. It will also foster greater understanding among the armed services and assist in the creation of a shared vision of joint operational objectives consistent with *Joint Vision 2020*.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

CHAPTER 3

DECISIVE POINTS

Today there is nothing to prevent a commander bent on a decisive battle from seeking out his enemy and attacking him.¹⁰⁰

Clausewitz, *On War*

THE “POINT” IN BEING DECISIVE

Clausewitz’s words from the 19th century could easily describe the goal of 21st century military planners. 21st century planners, however, may be less certain of the outcome. With a common conceptual vision of what “decisive” means, as discussed in the last chapter, the next logical step involves deciding how to be decisive. Planners, in translating political objectives into military action accomplishing those objectives, need to determine the “how” of accomplishing the Army’s desire to “conclusively” determine the outcome of operations, and the Marine Corps’ “result beyond itself.” The existing doctrinal means to do this is by attacking “decisive points.”

The concept of “decisive points” is another idea with importance for both the Army and the joint force as it seeks prowess in 21st century operations. Decisive points, according to ST 3-0, are elements of operational design that identify keys to “attacking or protecting” a center of gravity.¹⁰¹ Decisive points are thus inextricably linked to the idea of a center of gravity. “Centers of gravity are those characteristics, capabilities, or

¹⁰⁰ Clausewitz, op cit., p. 246.

¹⁰¹ ST 3-0, op cit., ¶ 5-30.

localities from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight.”¹⁰² “COGs are the foundation of capability -- what Clausewitz called the ‘hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends . . . the point at which all our energies should be directed.’”¹⁰³ The good news is that the lack of uniformity, or in many cases lack at all, of any definition of the word “decisive” is not also true with the term “center of gravity.” The new draft version of Joint Pub 3-0; the Army’s ST 3-0 and FM 101-5-1 (MCRP 5-2A); the Air Force’s AFDD 1; and the Navy’s NWP 1; all contain the same definition of center of gravity derived from Joint Pub 1-02.¹⁰⁴

There is sound agreement where the center of gravity concept is concerned. The draft of Joint Pub 3-0 discusses in detail the COG concept, indicating the utility of COG analysis. The value of COG analysis remains despite the lack of a readily discernable COG or a COG that changes during an operation. “The COG concept is useful as an **analytical tool** while designing campaigns and operations to assist commanders and staffs in analyzing friendly and adversary sources of strength as well as weaknesses and vulnerabilities. **Analysis of COGs**, both adversary and friendly, **is a**

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, ¶ 5-27. Joint Pub 3-0 (5 February 2001 Draft) also uses this same definition. See Joint Pub 3-0 (Draft), pp. III-24, GL-5. As indicated in the joint publication, upon approval of the Joint Pub draft, Joint Pub 1-02 will be modified to include this definition of COG.

¹⁰³ Joint Pub 3-0 (5 February 2001 Draft), op cit., p. III-24.

¹⁰⁴ Joint Pub 3-0 (5 February 2001 Draft), op cit., p. III-24 to III-25, GL -5; ST 3-0, op cit., ¶ 5-27; FM 101-5-1 (MCRP 5-2A), op cit., p. 1-24; AFDD 1, op cit., p. 79; NWP 1, op cit., p. 72. The Joint Pub 1-02 definition of center of gravity is found on page 72. See Joint Pub 1-02, op cit., p. 72.

continuous process throughout an operation.”¹⁰⁵ For Joint Pub 3-0, the continuous COG evaluation process is a vital part of the exercise of operational art:

The essence of operational art lies in being able to mass effects against the adversary’s sources of power in order to destroy or neutralize them. In theory, **destruction or neutralization of adversary COGs is the most direct path to victory**. However, COGs can change during the course of an operation and, at any given time, COGs may not be readily discernible. For example, the COG might concern the mass of adversary units, but that mass might not yet be formed. In such cases, *determining the absence of a COG and keeping it from forming could be as important as defining it.*¹⁰⁶

While COG analysis may be part of the essence of operational art, COG analysis also applies at the strategic and tactical levels as well. “At the strategic level, COGs might include a military force, an alliance, national will or public support, a set of critical capabilities or function, or national strategy itself. COGs also may exist at the operational and tactical levels. Examples include a regional communications facility and a battalion command post.”¹⁰⁷

Where the issue becomes “fuzzy” again is in reaching a common understanding of the terminology used in discussing how to attack or otherwise prevent an adversary from drawing upon power from the center of gravity, or how to articulate a way to protect a friendly center of gravity. The concept of the “decisive point” as the focus for military efforts to defeat a center of gravity, or of protecting a friendly “decisive point” to preserve a friendly center of gravity, is not universal. Based upon a definition of decisive points which is still being staffed as part of the draft version of Joint Pub 3-0, within ST

¹⁰⁵ Joint Pub 3-0 (5 February 2001 Draft), op cit., p. III-24. Bold emphasis is from the original.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* Bold emphasis is in the original. Emphasis in italics is added. ST 3-0 elaborates similar thoughts about COG importance. ST 3-0, op cit., ¶¶ 5-27 through 5-29.

3-0 the decisive point “is a geographic place, specific key event, or enabling system that allows commanders to gain a marked advantage over an enemy and greatly influence the outcome of an attack.”¹⁰⁸ This formulation of a “decisive point” may owe its origin to Baron Antoine Henri Jomini. In the Art of War, Jomini introduces the idea of the “decisive strategic point” as possession of geography or terrain that makes an occupying force “capable of exercising a marked influence either upon the result of the campaign or upon a single enterprise.”¹⁰⁹ A related concept, the “geographic strategic point,” is “every point of the theater of war which is of military importance, whether from its position as a center of communication or from the presence of military establishments or fortifications.”¹¹⁰

Jomini further describes a means for selecting decisive points: “The decisive point of a battlefield is determined by: 1. Features of the ground. 2. Relation of the local features to the ultimate strategic aim. 3. Positions occupied by the respective forces.”¹¹¹ Jomini also discusses objective points, which essentially equate to decisive points:

There are two classes of objective points – objective *points of maneuver and geographical objective points*. A geographical objective point may be an important fortress, the line of a river, or a front of operations which affords good lines of defense or good points of support for ulterior enterprises. Objective points of maneuver, in contradistinction, derive

¹⁰⁷ Joint Pub 3-0 (5 February 2001 Draft), *op cit.*, p. III-24.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Joint Pub 3-0 (5 February 2001 Draft) used this exact same definition for decisive points. See Joint Pub 3-0 (Draft), p. GL-9. This definition will also modify Joint Pub 1-02 upon approval and publication of the new Joint Pub 3-0.

¹⁰⁹ Antoine Henri Jomini, The Art of War, in Roots of Strategy, Book 2 (J.D. Hittle, editor) (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1987), p. 467.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 466.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

their importance from (and their positions depend upon) the situation of the hostile masses.¹¹²

Jomini's suggestion of objective points that have a focus on maneuver, which is still geographically centric in one sense, is nevertheless expansive in that it considers the strategic and tactical significance of dealing a blow to an adversary by striking at an area of critical vulnerability,¹¹³ which in Jomini's time (and Clausewitz's also) was normally the opposing military force.

Ultimately, concludes Jomini, “[i]n strategy the *object of the campaign* determines the objective point.”¹¹⁴ Strategy embraces “[d]etermination of the decisive points in these combinations and the most favorable direction for operations.”¹¹⁵ Jomini thus links decisive points with decisive operations, where forces “maneuver to engage

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 468. Emphasis is in the original.

¹¹³ The idea of a critical vulnerability is part of an extensive analysis relating COGs to decisive points. Under this methodology, enemy capabilities may be viewed as being comprised of: critical capabilities (CCs, things the enemy is able to do); critical requirements (CRs, things the enemy needs to exercise his capabilities, be they resource or will driven); and critical vulnerabilities (CVs, areas where the spheres of critical capabilities and critical vulnerabilities intersect, and essentially become targets for attack that will damage, limit, or destroy the enemy's critical capabilities or critical requirements). Successful attack of critical vulnerabilities, by lethal or nonlethal means as part of a campaign strategy, is designed to directly influence the enemy's COG. Critical vulnerabilities, then, are decisive points. See Joseph Strange, “Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clausewitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language”, *Perspectives on Warfighting, Number 4, Second Edition* (Quantico, Virginia: The Marine Corps University Foundation, 1996). The CC – CR – CV method has been embraced by the Marine Corps, and is also discussed in their doctrinal publications. See MCDP 1, *Warfighting*, pp. 45-47; MCDP 1-1, *Strategy*, pp. 83-89; MCDP 1-2, *Campaigning*, pp. 41-44.

¹¹⁴ Jomini, *op cit.*, p. 468. Emphasis is added. Jomini also defines what he means by strategy: “Strategy decides where to act; logistics brings the troops to this point; grand tactics decides the manner of execution and the employment of the troops.” *Ibid.*, p. 460.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

fractions of the hostile army with the bulk of one's forces," and "throw the mass of the [friendly] forces upon the decisive point" where "they shall engage at the proper times and with ample energy."¹¹⁶ Jomini also notes, however, that while throwing the mass of forces at one place or another is simple, "the difficulty lies in recognizing those [decisive] points."¹¹⁷

The obvious limitation to the Army definition of decisive points is that the ultimate focus is again the realm of combat, seeking to influence the outcome of an attack, perhaps unnecessarily limiting application of the concept to peace operations. The definition is also largely oriented at the tactical level. To the extent that decisive point analysis is part and parcel of center of gravity (COG) analysis, relating decisive points to the tactical level or combat alone may wrongly limit the utility of decisive points as analytical tools in the MDMP process, and inhibit the strategic and operational thinking in the planning process. The same concern can be applied to suggesting that a decisive point is "geographic," or "an enabling system." The value of the decisive point lies in the idea itself, in identification of ways in which the influence and power of an adversary COG may be assailed, and not in imposing a limitation which discourages the "outside the box" approaches military thinkers may need for success in 21st century operations.

The more expansive elaboration of decisive points found draft Joint Pub 3-0 and ST 3-0 is also lost in the Army's further definition of a decisive point as contained in FM 101-5-1, where a "decisive point" is described as "usually *geographic* in nature," and alternative definitions include a "potential point of decision" (essentially, a "decision

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

point,” which further confuses matters), and “a time or location where enemy weakness is positioned” to allow overwhelming combat power to be applied.¹¹⁸ The idea of a decisive point as a means of attacking an enemy center of gravity, or protecting a friendly center of gravity, and of the possible existence of multiple decisive points, is absent from FM 101-5-1’s terrain-focused definition.

The Army does define both the concept and meaning of a “decisive point” within its new doctrine in ST 3-0, however, which helps advance the establishment of a common doctrinal understanding. That is not true in the joint world. Joint Pub 1-02 does not list, or define, the concept of the “decisive point.” Joint Pub 1-02 does identify a “critical point,” which is similar to the Army’s idea of a “decision point,” but far from the concept of a “decisive point.”¹¹⁹ Fortunately, an attempt to correct this oversight is being addressed in the formulation of the new Joint Pub 3-0. Within its discussion of COG importance, Joint Pub 3-0 (5 February 2001 Draft) discusses decisive points:

By correctly **identifying** and **controlling decisive points**, a commander can gain a marked advantage over the adversary and greatly influence the outcome of an action. Decisive points are usually **geographic in nature**, such as a constricted sea lane, a hill, a town, or an air based and could include other elements such as command posts, critical boundaries, airspace, or communications and/or intelligence nodes. In some specific cases, **specific key events also may be decisive points**, such as attainment of air or naval superiority or commitment of the adversary’s

¹¹⁸ FM 101-5-1, op cit., p. 1-46.

¹¹⁹ Within Joint Pub 1-02, a critical point is: “1. A key geographical point or position important to the success of an operation. 2. In point of time, a crisis or a turning point in an operation. 3. A selected point along a line of march used for reference in giving instructions. 4. A point where there is a change of direction or change in slope in a ridge or stream. 5.. Any point along a route of march where interference with a troop movement may occur.” Joint Pub 1-02, op cit., p. 117. Compare this with FM 101-5-1, which also contains the Joint Pub 1-02 definition of “critical point,” and FM 101-5-1’s definition of a “decision point.” FM 101-5-1, op cit., p. 1-42, 1-45.

reserve. In still other cases, **decisive points may be systemic**, such as C2 systems and refueling or ammunition storage capability. *Decisive points are not COGs; they are the keys to attacking protected COGs.*¹²⁰

Decisive points are inherently related to the idea of a center of gravity, and logically related to decisive operations that conclusively determine outcomes.

CLAUSEWITZ, SISTER SERVICES, AND DECISIVE POINTS

As was the case with the concept of “decisive,” the U.S. Air Force and Navy do not define the concept of “decisive points” in their basic doctrine. The Marine Corps has fully integrated the concept of decisive points, and COG analysis, into their doctrine.¹²¹ Failure to identify a common language within the military to allow effective discussion of decisive points potentially damages joint capability while simultaneously inhibiting the intellectual processes that create theory, inform policy and strategy, and drive doctrine. Realization of *Joint Vision 2020* intent that joint decisive operations be executed by 21st century forces of the United States military requires that the concept of a center of gravity, which is embraced and defined by all the military services, also be linked with a common concept of “decisive points.” These definitions, these concepts, are doctrine, and they have meaning related to the development of common understanding and shared vision. Without it, unity of action becomes difficult, and departure from the common

¹²⁰ Joint Pub 3-0 (5 February 2001 Draft), *op cit.*, p. III-25. Bold emphasis is in the original; italics have been added for emphasis. A definition of “decisive point” mirroring that of the Army’s in ST 3-0 is also included in the glossary of the draft joint publication. *Ibid.*, p. GL-9. This definition will be added to Joint Pub 1-02 upon approval of the new Joint Pub 3-0. *Ibid.*

¹²¹ See note 113.

understanding to develop “out-of-the-box” solutions is not an option because chaos may result from a lack of structured thought and analysis as a baseline.

Identification of decisive points is critical. The new draft of Joint Pub 3-0 recognizes the importance of decisive points in directing an operation, and in informing the planning process; so does Clausewitz. Clausewitz notes that the degree of decisiveness of an operation is “based on the skillful concentration of *superior strength at the decisive point*, [which] is much more frequently based on the correct appraisal of this decisive point, on *suitable planning from the start*.¹²² While Clausewitz’s main concern may have been the concentration of military force at the decisive point as a means to defeat the enemy’s true center of gravity (the opposing Army), his thoughts take into consideration the political reality that destruction of enemy military forces may not always be the primary goal of a military operation. “The purpose in question may be the destruction of the enemy’s forces, *but not necessarily so*; it may be quite different. As we have shown, the destruction of the enemy is not the only means of attaining the political object, when there are other objectives for which war is waged. It follows that those *other objectives can also become the purpose of particular military operations*, and thus also the purpose of engagements.”¹²³

There is no uniform framework for COG and decisive point analysis in military doctrine today. With the move away from strict spatial orientation of the battlefield (deep, close, rear) to a more distributive flow focused on the purpose of forces as found in ST 3-0, the importance of linking the idea of “decisive operations,” COGs, and

¹²² Clausewitz, *op cit.*, p. 197. Emphasis is added.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 95. Emphasis is added.

“decisive points” is apparent. That framework should be established. If Joint Vision 2020 and the draft of Joint Pub 3-0 is to be taken seriously, a common methodology for COG analysis is essential to 21st century forces of the United States military.

CHAPTER 4

A SYNTHESIS OF IDEAS

The nation that draws too great a distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools.¹²⁴

Unknown

COUP D'OEIL

Like scholars and warriors, the importance of thought, of reflection over ideas and what they *mean*, should not be underestimated. A common definition for the term “decisive” needs to become part of the military lexicon for 21st century, along with common understandings and approaches for COG analysis and decisive points. From that common understanding, the development of insight evolves. “If the mind is to emerge unscathed from this relentless struggle with the unforeseen,” reasons Clausewitz, “two qualities are indispensable: *first, an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead.* The first of these qualities is described by the French term, *coup d'oeil*; the second is determination.”¹²⁵ “When all is said and done, it really is the commander’s *coup d'oeil*, his ability to see things simply, to identify the whole business of war completely with himself, that is the essence of good

¹²⁴ MCDP 1-1, op cit., p. 1.

¹²⁵ Clausewitz, op cit., p. 102. Emphasis is in the original.

generalship.”¹²⁶ Clausewitz concludes: “Only if the mind works in this comprehensive fashion can it achieve the freedom it needs to dominate events and not be dominated by them.”¹²⁷

EVALUATION

The following criteria, taken from *Joint Vision 2020*’s operational concepts, have been formulated to examine the current state of U.S. thought and doctrine concerning decisive operations, decisive points, and COG analysis. The criteria are listed and defined below:

(1) Dominant Maneuver. “Dominant Maneuver is the ability of joint forces to gain positional advantage with decisive speed and overwhelming operational tempo in the achievement of assigned military tasks. Widely dispersed joint air, land, sea, amphibious, special operations and space forces, capable of scaling and massing force or forces and the effects of fires as required for either combat or noncombat operations, will secure advantage across the range of military operations through the application of information, deception, engagement, mobility and counter-mobility capabilities.”¹²⁸

(2) Precision Engagement. “Precision Engagement is the ability of joint forces to locate, surveil, discern, and track objectives or targets; select, organize, and use the correct systems; generate desired effects; assess results; and reengage with decisive speed

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 578. Emphasis is in the original.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Joint Vision 2020*, op cit., p. 20.

and overwhelming operational tempo as required, throughout the full range of military operations.”¹²⁹

(3) Focused logistics. “Focused logistics is the ability to provide the joint force the right personnel, equipment, and supplies in the right place, at the right time, and in the right quantity, across the full range of military operations. This will be made possible through a real-time, web-based information system providing total asset visibility as part of a common relevant operational picture, effectively linking the operator and logistician across Services and support agencies. Through transformational innovations to organizations and processes, focused logistics will provide the joint warfighter with support for all functions.”¹³⁰

(4) Full Dimensional Protection. “Full Dimensional Protection is the ability of the joint force to protect its personnel and other assets required to decisively execute assigned tasks. Full dimensional protection is achieved through the tailored selection and application of multilayered active and passive measures, within the domains of air, land, sea, space, and information across the range of military operations with an acceptable level of risk.”¹³¹

These criteria are consistent with the goals outlined in the *National Security Strategy* and the requirements for joint operational capability expressed in *Joint Vision 2020*.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Joint Vision 2020 recognizes the likelihood that friendly forces in future conflict may have to conduct operations in a non-continuous environment where there is not necessarily another friendly unit to the immediate right or left. In such an environment, traditional ideas of mass, especially for ground forces, may logically be harder to attain. To combat this potential problem, *Joint Vision 2020* stresses that the 21st century force be able to gain positional advantage with decisive speed and overwhelming operational tempo as part of dominant maneuver. “The joint force capable of dominant maneuver will possess unmatched speed and agility in positioning and repositioning tailored forces from widely dispersed locations to achieve operational objectives quickly and decisively.”¹³² *Joint Vision 2020*, being a *prospective* document that looks to the anticipated needs of *future* capability, discusses what capabilities the *Joint Vision 2020* force *will* possess, not the capability the force *now* possesses. For the 21st century military force, which comes first: the chicken or the egg? Does the development of weapons or other capability drive the writing of doctrine and a theoretical basis for that doctrine, or does doctrine inform and guide the development of capability?

Given the language used in *Joint Vision 2020*, it would seem that the ideas are driving the development of capability, and not the other way around. *Joint Vision 2020* “does not describe counters to specific threats, nor does it enumerate weapon, communication, or other systems we will develop or purchase. Rather, its purpose is to describe in broad terms . . . operational capabilities that will be required for the joint

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

force to succeed across the full range of military operations and accomplish its mission in 2020 and beyond.”¹³³

This has implications not only for the first criterion, dominant maneuver, but also for the others. Dominant maneuver, precision engagement, focused logistics, and full dimensional protection all express views of what *ought* to be, not what *is*. What *ought to be* eventually becomes, through mere passage of time if advanced in no other fashion, *what is*. *What is* changes:

Circumstances vary so enormously in war, and are so indefinable, that a vast array of factors has to be appreciated – mostly in the light of probabilities alone. The man responsible for evaluating the whole must bring to his task the quality of intuition that perceives the truth at every point. Otherwise a *chaos of opinions* and considerations would arise, and fatally entangle judgment. Bonaparte rightly said in this connection that many of the decisions faced by the commander-in-chief resemble mathematical problems worth of the gifts of a *Newton* or an *Euler*.¹³⁴

A chaos of opinions can also arise not just from the uncertainty of war, conflict, or the details of a specific operation, but also from diverse courses of action developed by military services without basic doctrinal understandings of essential terms such as “decisive.” Proper planning, originating from common understandings of basic doctrinal principles, helps avoid mistakes that could lead to mission failure or even unnecessary loss of life.

Joint Vision 2020 is a document about thought, about considering on an intellectual level the capabilities needed for future conflicts (to include peace operations as well as traditional combat). The difficulty in that task remains the translation of those

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

¹³⁴ Clausewitz, op cit., p. 112. Emphasis on “chaos of opinions” added. Other emphasis is in the original.

thoughts into the realm of the physical, into Schneider's physical dimension of the battlefield that allow the reality of "what is" to be dominated. The *coup d'oeil* described by Clausewitz helps enable a military commander or planner "to dominate events and not be dominated by them."¹³⁵

The role of military doctrine, then, becomes apparent. Just as *Joint Vision 2020* guides the military forces of the future, so too does theory, and doctrine, guide the forces that will be charged with finding solutions to complex problems in support of U.S. national objectives. All the evaluation criteria from *Joint Vision 2020* express an explicit or implicit need for some type of "decisive" action. Dominant maneuver for *Joint Vision 2020* speaks of the need for "decisive speed," and the ability to "shape the course of events and minimize hostilities or react decisively if hostilities erupt."¹³⁶ Precision engagement, like dominant maneuver, also seeks "decisive speed," and has as a goal the ability to "facilitate dominant maneuver *and* decisive close combat."¹³⁷ Focused logistics, while not associating itself with the term "decisive," deals with the means to "provide the joint warfighter with support for all functions," and without that logistical support for dispersed units the ability to engage in decision operations of any type would be severely compromised.¹³⁸ Full dimensional protection ensures that U.S. joint military forces are "capable of conducting decisive operations despite our adversaries' use of a wide range of weapons (including weapons of mass destruction), the conduct of

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 578.

¹³⁶ *Joint Vision 2020*, op cit., p. 20.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23. Emphasis is added.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

information operations or terrorist attacks, or the presence of asymmetric threats during any phase of these operations.”¹³⁹ “Full dimension protection exists when the joint force can decisively achieve its mission with an acceptable degree of risk in both the physical and information domains.”¹⁴⁰

In order to plan the usage, implementation, or even procurement of the force envisioned by *Joint Vision 2020*, a basic, common, doctrinal understanding of what decisive *means* is elemental. Currently, only the Marine Corps has a published doctrinal definition of what it actually means to be decisive. While the Army’s definition in ST 3-0 comes close to establishing a specific meaning with its suggestion that decisive operations conclusively determine an outcome for battles or engagements, the Air Force and Navy repeatedly refer to decisive military actions in basic doctrinal sources without ever defining what is meant by decisive. There is no definition of “decisive” in joint publications. How can the joint force of *Joint Vision 2020* be prepared to conduct decisive operations, and effectively employ dominant maneuver, precision engagement, focused logistics, and full dimension protection at the joint level without a common service understanding and a shared vision of decisive action?

Much greater success for development of a shared understanding exists where COG definitions and analysis are concerned. At the joint level, and within all the military services, the definition of a COG is standard. A breakdown occurs immediately afterward, however, with the absence of any uniformity in fully describing COG analysis. Only the Army has a current working definition of a “decisive point,” and decisive point

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

analysis is integral to fully understanding the concept of a COG. Even in the absence of an identified COG, decisive points may exist as a conceptual tool to express a means of addressing the strengths or weakness of a potential adversary. In that sense, COG analysis, by whatever moniker, has as much direct application also to operations at lower “tactical” levels (like battalion and company for the Army and Marine Corps) as it does to the strategic and operational levels of war. Just as is true regarding a definition of “decisive,” a common definition of “decisive points,” and uniform application of a decisive point methodology (to include the Marine Corps’ CC – CR – CV approach) within military doctrine, will be required before the *Joint Vision 2020* goals of dominant maneuver, precision engagement, focused logistics, and full dimension protection can be fully articulated conceptually and become a physical reality.

CONCLUSION

“Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult.”¹⁴¹ Those difficulties may lie in the realm of the battlefield, in the realm of the mind, or in the realm of the services themselves. This monograph has identified agreement on the joint level and among the services regarding the importance of defining COGs and performing COG analysis. It has also identified a serious lack of common focus doctrinally concerning the meaning of “decisive” operations and “decisive points.” For some services, an elaboration of what a “decisive point” is does not even exist. There is no joint definition of the meaning of “decisive,” or “decisive points,” in Joint Pub 1-02. Evolving doctrine at the joint level with the new Joint Pub 3-0 (5 February 2001 Draft) and the Army’s

¹⁴¹ Clausewitz, op cit., p. 119.

proposed FM 3-0 (ST 3-0) is moving to help combat this doctrinal void, but inter-service differences still confuse the issue. Since language in the *National Security Strategy*, the *National Military Strategy*, and *Joint Vision 2020* all seek as a goal the ability to engage in “decisive” action, and the uniformed services themselves discuss “decisive” action while many do not define what it means, a serious conceptual disconnect exists that can negatively impact future military operations by inhibiting the unity of action among joint forces required for success in the 21st century.

The all-too-easy temptation is to simply view these doctrinal disconnects as unimportant, and suggest that doctrine, like a rose, “by any other name still smells as sweet.” If services think in terms of decisive action, COGs, and decisive points, but simply don’t call them that or relate to those concepts in that fashion, does it really matter? Is this doctrinal crisis a red-herring, and akin to Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*?

The direct answer is no. Words have meaning. That is especially true in military operations where misunderstanding can lead to the ultimate sacrifice. “War is no pastime; it is no mere joy in daring and winning, no place for irresponsible enthusiasts,” writes Clausewitz.¹⁴² “It is a serious means to a serious end, and for all its colorful resemblance to a game of chance, all the vicissitudes of passion, courage, imagination, and enthusiasm it includes are merely special characteristics.”¹⁴³ To use Dr. James Schneider’s boat analogy from Chapter 1, if Dr. Schneider is correct that military doctrine is indeed the “rudder” and theory is the “helmsman,” a failure to address these

¹⁴² Clausewitz, *op cit.*, p. 86.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

issues of decisiveness deemed so important by pivotal guidance such as that found in *Joint Vision 2020* leaves the helmsman without a means to steer; the boat without a means to arrive at its destination; and the course of military thought and action subject to every ebb and swell of the tide.

“Doctrine,” again, “first defines the profession along common conceptual lines . . . [and] provides the framework for effective unified action in training, education, and war.”¹⁴⁴ Using the definition for “decisive” developed by the Marine Corps as a starting point, and incorporating new Army and joint doctrine contained in the draft versions of Joint Pub 3-0 and FM 3-0 (ST 3-0), is a realistic, and productive, means to begin the development of a doctrinal base to link the objectives of national strategy, and *Joint Vision 2020*, with the transformation of U.S. military forces for duty in the 21st century.

¹⁴⁴ Schneider, “How War Works,” op cit., p. 10.

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